

**Case 3474*****Aplonis* Gould, 1836 (Aves: STURNIDAE): proposed conservation of spelling**

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this application, under Articles 23.9.3 and 81.1 of the Code, is to conserve the long- and widely-accepted spelling *Aplonis* Gould, 18 October 1836 for the Indo-Australasian glossy starlings (STURNIDAE) by suppression of the prior but little used spelling *Aplornis* Gould, 1 or 3 October 1836.

**Keywords.** Nomenclature; taxonomy; Aves; STURNIDAE; *Aplonis*; *Aplornis*; *Aplonis marginata*; glossy starlings; Indo-Australasia.

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1. The 24 or so species of west Pacific glossy starlings (Aves: STURNIDAE) have been known almost universally by the generic name *Aplonis* since the genus was described by John Gould in 1836. Gould (1836a, p. 73) read *Aplonis* for publication at the 26 July 1836 meeting of the Zoological Society of London, and it was published in that spelling in the number of the Society's *Proceedings* which appeared on 18 October 1836 (Sclater, 1893). Described with it were two new named species, *Aplonis marginata* Gould, 1836 and *A. fusca* Gould, 1836. The former (a junior synonym of *Lanius tabuensis* Gmelin, 1788, a name overlooked by Gould) was subsequently chosen as the type species by G.R. Gray (1855, p. 66), who there corrected previous errors in designation. Earlier, he (Gray 1840, p. 40; 1841, p. 53) had designated two type species together in *Aplonis*, namely '*A. novae hollandiae*, (Lath. / Gm.)' = *Turdus novaehollandiae* Gmelin, 1789 and '*A. fuscus*, Gould?' = *Aplonis fusca* Gould, 1836. The first of these nominal species was not included in Gould's description of the genus, and the second, though included, had been cited by Gray (1840, p. 40; 1841, p. 53) under a question mark. Thus neither designation is admissible under Articles 67.2 and 67.5.3 of the Code, contra Mathews (1930, p. 846) and Amadon (1962, p. 75).

2. *Aplonis* in that spelling has since been used for the west Pacific glossy starlings in hundreds of references in scientific journals, conservation reports, ornithological newsletters, regional and global checklists, regional and global handbooks, and field guides up to the present day. In the national Australian ornithological journal, *Emu*, it was used in 98 papers alone during the 20th century, covering diverse subjects. Reference works using *Aplonis* include, among many others:



(1) global checklists: Sharpe, 1909; Amadon, 1962; Wolters, 1980; Sibley & Monroe, 1990; Monroe & Sibley, 1993; Wells, 1998; Dickinson, 2003; Gill & Wright, 2006; Clements, 2007;

(2) regional checklists: R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee, 1926 (Australia); Mathews, 1930 (Australasian region); Chasen, 1935 (Malaysia); Mayr, 1941 (New Guinea); Ripley, 1961 (Indian subcontinent); Schodde, 1975 (Australia); Beehler & Finch, 1985 (New Guinea); White & Bruce, 1986 (east Indonesia); van Marle & Voous, 1988 (Sumatra); Christidis & Boles, 1994 (Australia); Inskipp et al., 1996 (Oriental region); Clayton et al., 2006 (Australia);

(3) global handbooks and conservation manuals: Sharpe, 1890; Mayr, 1942, p. 37; Greenway, 1967; Collar & Andrew, 1988, pp. 164–165; Sibley & Ahlquist, 1990, pp. 636, 864; Feare & Craig, 1998;

(4) regional handbooks and conservation manuals: Mathews, 1925–1927, 1928 (Australia, Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands); Smythies, 1953 (Myanmar); Rand & Gilliard, 1967 (New Guinea); duPont, 1971 (Philippines); Ali & Ripley, 1972 (India); Diamond, 1972 (New Guinea); duPont, 1976 (south Pacific); Ovington, 1978 (Australia and territories); Hannecart & Letocart, 1980 (New Caledonia); Watling, 1982 (Fiji, Tonga, Samoa); Schodde et al., 1983 (Norfolk Island); Clunie, 1984 (Fiji); Schodde & Tidemann, 1986 (Australia); Gonzales & Rees, 1988 (Philippines); Bregulla, 1992 (Vanuatu); Schodde & Mason, 1999 (Australia); Smythies, 1999 (Borneo); Garnett & Crowley, 2000 (Australia); Mayr & Diamond, 2001 (Melanesia); Barrett et al., 2003 (Australia); Hadden, 2004 (Solomons); Beruldsen, 2003 (Australia); Peter, 2006 (Australia); Steadman, 2006 (tropical west Pacific); Wells, 2007 (Malaysia-Thailand);

(5) field guides: Mayr, 1945 (Melanesia and Polynesia); Delacour & Mayr, 1946 (Philippines); Delacour, 1947 (Malaysia); Glenister, 1951 (peninsular Malaysia); Delacour, 1966 (New Caledonia); Wildash, 1968 (Vietnam); Lekagul & Cronin, 1974 (Thailand); King & Dickinson, 1975 (southeast Asia); Beehler et al., 1986 (New Guinea); Pratt et al., 1987 (Polynesia, Micronesia); McKinnon, 1988 (Java, Bali); Coates & Bishop, 1997 (east Indonesia); McKinnon & Phillipps, 1993 (Greater Sundas); Pizzey & Knight, 1997 (Australia); Holmes & Phillips, 1998 (peninsular Malaysia); Doughty et al., 1999 (Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia); Simpson & Day, 1999 (Australia); Robson, 2000 (southeast Asia); Coates & Peckover, 2001 (east Papuasia); Watling, 2001 (western Polynesia); Morecombe, 2003 (Australia).

3. As shown by Mathews (1938, p. 342; 1945, p. 319), the name had actually been published available two weeks earlier, and in a different spelling, *Aplornis*. On 1 or 3 October 1836, it appeared under Gould's authority with a skimmed description and without named species in a newspaper report of the meeting of the Zoological Society of London at which Gould had read *Aplonis* for publication (Gould, 1836b, p. 152). Gould is the author of the name under Article 50.2 of the Code. It is one of 10 generic and 42 specific names which, long-accepted as having been published by Gould and others in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* and diverse monographs, have since been found to have been published prematurely but available in prior, brief newspaper reports of the meetings of the Zoological Society at which the names were first read (Bruce & McAllan, 1990). Where senior, they are valid, as is the case with *Aplornis*. Schodde & Bock (1997) subsequently applied to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature for blanket suppression of



the ‘newspaper’ names. Although the Commission rejected Schodde & Bock’s (1997) application in Opinion 2026 (BZN 2003 60: 79–80), a number of Commissioners recommended case by case submission for those names that would create instability if adopted. *Aplornis* Gould versus the long-established spelling *Aplonis* is one such case.

4. It might be thought that Gould’s intention was to spell the name ‘*Aplornis*’; but this does not seem to be the case. Not only did he spell it *Aplonis* three times without variation in his description of the genus in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (Gould 1836a, p. 73), but in the only other publication in which he used the name – the *Supplement* to his *The Birds of Australia* (Gould 1869, text and title to plate 33) – he again used *Aplonis* exclusively, both as a generic name and as an anglicised vernacular, ‘Shining *Aplonis*’. Gould never explained the source of the name. In one interpretation since, David & Gosselin (2002, p. 270) considered *Aplonis* to be an arbitrary combination of letters derived from the Greek *aploos* = simple and *ornis* = bird, and implicitly correct if original (Articles 11.3, 32.2, 32.5 of the Code). In another admitted guess, the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee (1926, p. 118) suggested ‘*Apollonis*’, from Apollo, the sun – ‘the bird is a “shining” bird’. Thus it is likely that the original spelling *Aplornis* in the newspaper report (Gould, 1836b, p. 152) reflects editorial emendation. Gould never made any mention of that spelling and, in common with other 19th century contemporaries, was almost certainly unaware of it.

5. Until Mathews (1938) unearthed the prior spelling *Aplornis*, *Aplonis* had been used in that spelling throughout all 19th and early 20th century literature dealing with the west Pacific glossy starlings (e.g. Gray, 1840, 1855; Sharpe in Gould, 1875–1888; Sharpe, 1890). Since then, *Aplonis* has been kept overwhelmingly in prevailing use as well, as demonstrated in paragraph 2 above. In contrast, the earlier spelling *Aplornis* has been widely ignored, and Wolters (1975–82, p. 437) and McAllan & Bruce (1989, pp. 73–74) explicitly rejected it, faulty reasoning notwithstanding. Up to the present, we have found just eight references that have accepted *Aplornis* as valid: Taka-Tsukasa & Yamashina (1931), Mathews (1938, 1945, 1946), Hachisuka et al., (1942), Bruce & McAllan (1990), McAllan (2007) and Christidis & Boles (2008, pp. 39, 208). Of these, only three are from the last 50 years, and four are in little known papers or works; in Mathews (1946, p. 145), moreover, *Aplornis* and *Aplonis* are both used – and confused – as valid.

6. Potential adoption of the senior spelling *Aplornis* will bring uncertainty about the correct name, with consequent instability. That the difference between *Aplonis* and *Aplornis* is in only one letter is a central part of the problem. It can be expected to engender confusion and misspelling, and will be sufficient to hinder, for example, digital searches for information on the glossy starlings by novice students and others aware of only one of the spellings. In the immediate future, this will be particularly serious for searches employing the so far little-used *Aplornis*.

7. Because the species of *Aplonis* occur throughout the west Pacific, west to southeast Asia and northeast India, north to Micronesia, east to Polynesia and south to Indonesia, New Guinea and Australia (Dickinson, 2003, pp. 651–653), correction to the spelling of that name will have impacts for a number of countries. Six species occur in New Guinea and its satellite archipelagos, five in Indonesia (excluding New Guinea), seven in the Solomon Islands, another seven in Micronesia and Polynesia



and two in the Philippines; one widespread species reaches Australia and another southeast Asia. A change to *Aplornis* will thus affect usage and nomenclatural stability in the ornithological literature of not only Indonesia, Melanesia and Polynesia but also other South-East Asian countries and Australia.

8. *Aplornis* cannot be set aside as a disused senior synonym under Article 23.9.2 of the Code because it has been used as valid several times in the 20th century (see para. 5 above). Schodde et al. (2007, p. 277) argued instead that *Aplonis* Gould, 1836 was an incorrect subsequent spelling of *Aplornis* Gould, 1836, both names being based by reference on Gould's original reading of the genus before the Zoological Society of London on 26 July 1836. In that case, *Aplonis* may, being in prevailing use, replace *Aplornis* as a correct original spelling under Article 33.3.1. Nevertheless, in adopting the spelling *Aplornis*, Christidis & Boles (2008, p. 208) disregarded such views. Application of Article 33.3.1 here could be open to challenge because the attribution of *Aplonis* Gould to the publication of the original spelling *Aplornis* is indirect, via Gould's reading before the Zoological Society of London in July 1836: see Schodde et al. (2007, pp. 276–277) and Schodde & Bock (2008, p. 43) for the sources and interconnections among such Gould names. Moreover, 'prevailing use', however much it may favour *Aplonis* over *Aplornis*, must be interpreted according to its definition in the Glossary of the Code (Article 89.1), and generalities in that definition could lead to future quibbling as well.

9. We therefore believe that Article 23.9.3 of the Code applies more appropriately to this case. So, to maintain the long- and overwhelmingly-accepted spelling *Aplonis* Gould firmly in its accustomed usage, we propose suppression of the little-known prior spelling, *Aplornis* Gould.

10. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked to use its plenary power:

- (1) to suppress the generic name *Aplornis* Gould, [1 or 3 October] 1836 for the Purposes of the Principle of Priority but not for the Purposes of the Principle of Homonymy;
- (2) to place on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology the name *Aplonis* Gould, 1836 (gender: feminine), type species by subsequent designation *Aplonis marginata* Gould, 1836;
- (3) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the name *marginata* Gould, 1836, as published in the binomen *Aplonis marginata* (specific name of the type species of *Aplonis* Gould, 1836);
- (4) to place on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Generic Names in Zoology the name *Aplornis* Gould, [1 or 3 October] 1836, as suppressed in (1) above.

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This application has been evaluated and approved by the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature (SCON) of the International Ornithological Committee.

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Comments on this case are invited for publication (subject to editing) in the *Bulletin*; they should be sent to the Executive Secretary, I.C.Z.N., c/o Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, U.K. (e-mail: iczn@nhm.ac.uk).